CHAPTER 3

GROUND TACTICAL PLAN

The ground tactical plan is the base from which commanders develop all other plans. They must complete the ground tactical plan before finalizing the landing plan, the air movement plan, and the marshaling plan. It provides the commander's intent, his concept of the operation, fire support plan, and task organization of the units making the initial assault. Ground combat in airborne operations is conducted along conventional lines but under unusual conditions. Once these conditions are appreciated, the tactics and techniques of ground combat can be applied to airborne operations. (See FMs 7-20 and 7-30 for a detailed discussion of combat operations.)

Section I. PLANNING

Once the airborne force commander receives the initiating directive/WO, he begins planning. This dircctivc/WO includes the following:

- Missions for subordinate units.
- The higher commander's concept of the operation.
- Command structure for the operation.
- Time and duration of the operation.
- Intelligence and security requirements
- Allocation and distribution of airlift assets.
- Unit deployment list and sequence.
- Departure airfields, REMABs, and ISBs.
- Signal requirements and instructions.
- Linkup and withdrawal concept.

3-1. ESTIMATE OF THE SITUATION

The military decision-making process incorporating the estimate of the situation results in a course of action as in any other operation. Unit commanders and staff officers cannot afford to deviate from this accepted procedure for the development process. As a technique, the ground tactical plan will normally be developed as the basic operations order/plan as discussed in FM 7-20 and FM 7-30. This is the most critical phase of the airborne operation because all other plans are based on it. When conducting the estimate, the commander and staff consider the various aspects of airborne combat conditions with regard to METT-T.

a. **Mission.** The mission of an airborne infantry battalion or brigade is to close with the enemy by means of fire and maneuver to destroy or capture

him, or to repel his assault by fire, close combat, and countcrattack. These missions usually require the seizure and defense of objectives and surrounding terrain. Forces rely strongly on the element of surprise. (See Appendix F for detailed information on the application of the IPB process as it relates to airborne operations.)

(1) In early linkup operations, the unit defends only the airhead and the required maneuver space.

(2) In linkup and independent operations, the tactical operation begins with an initial assault; it then passes to the defense of the established airhead until enough forces can be delivered to the objective area.

(3) On reinforcement or on linkup with other ground forces, the airborne units resume the offensive within the commander's concept of the operation or withdraw to prepare for subsequent operations.

b. **Enemy Forces.** Commanders analyze all available information to determine the enemy's situation. The following factors are considered:

(1) Enemy morale, leadership, and probable intentions.

(2) Enemy capabilities.

(3) Enemy tactics.

(4) Probable enemy reactions to an airborne assault.

(a) The enemy that can react the fastest poses the most immediate threat.

(b) The enemy that can cause the most damage or prevent the airborne force from accomplishing its mission poses the most significant threat.

(5) Enemy reserves and paramilitary organizations (gendarmeries, police, border guards, and militia) and their ability to mobilize and react. This is especially critical before deep attacks.

(6) Enemy capability to conduct guerrilla, partisan, or sabotage activities and the enemy's relationship to the local population.

c. **Terrain and Weather.** Within this category, the staff must consider and act on the following factors

(1) The availability of DZs, LZs. and EZs (division or corps staff provides a landing area study to subordinate elements before the preparation of the landing plan). However, the availability and selection of DZs should not influence the selection of assault objectives, the airhead line, or unit boundaries.

(2) Obstacles within the airhead line and out to the maximum effective range of direct- and indirect-fire weapons, with emphasis on those that can be prepared or reinforced with minimal engineer effort.

(3) Enemy avenues of approach, since the enemy will try to reach and destroy the airborne force before it can assemble and reorganize. This consideration weighs heavily in determining the location of assault objectives.

(4) Key terrain that can determine how the airborne force can best defend the area in depth.

(5) Friendly and enemy observation and fields of fire (particularly for indirect fires and antiarmor weapons).

(6) Cover and concealment (especially for assembly and reorganization).

(7) The staff must also consider the effects of climate and weather on the following:

- Flight formations.
- Trafficability.
- Visibility.
- Close air support.
- Logistics.
- Personnel and equipment.

d. **Troops Available.** Commanders consider all forces available to accomplish the mission. These include all assigned, attached, and supporting forces.

(1) *US ground forces.* Commanders evaluate the plans, missions, capabilities, and limitations of US ground forces. They consider whether artillery can support the airborne forces and whether the forces will perform a linkup or passage of lines.

(2) *Air Force.* Close air support can often make up for the lack of armor and heavy artillery. The airborne commander must consider the USAF ability to sustain the force and must bring knowledgeable airlift and tactical air planners together early.

(3) *Navy.* The airborne commander examines the availability and feasibility of NGF support and naval or USMC air support. Early arrangements for liaison and coordination must be made to support the operation.

e. **Time.** Time is critical in all operations. There are several time considerations that are unique to an airborne operation. Significant time may be required to mass the lift force (Air Force aircraft). The time between the initial assault and the deployment of the follow-on echelon must be considered. Supply and CSS planning is driven by the amount of time before linkup or withdrawal.

f. **Indigenous Population.** The airborne force commander must consider national and regional characteristics such as —

- Religion and customs.
- Politics and tribal affiliations,
- Support (or lack of it) for central and local governments or occupying powers.
- Loyalty to political or military leaders.
- Available labor.
- Support (or lack of it) for US forces.

3-2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE GROUND TACTICAL PLAN

The ground tactical plan incorporates considerations for those actions to be taken in the objective area; for example, during the assault and subsequent operations phases. This will be the first plan to be finalized. It must be keyed on accomplishment of the commander's concept of the operation.

a. The ground tactical plan is developed as any other tactical plan using the procedure as delineated in FM 7-20, Chapter 2. However, the initial goal of airborne operations is the establishment of an airhead and its subsequent defense.

b. The ground tactical plan's essential elements are developed in the following sequence: the airhead line and the assault objectives (selected concurrently); the security zone and R&S forces; boundaries and assault task organizations (selected concurrently); and reserves.

3-3. SELECTION OF ASSAULT OBJECTIVES AND AIRHEAD LINE

Based on an analysis of the situation, commanders select specific assault objectives. (Figure 3-1.) Although the airhead line is developed and the assault objectives determined concurrently, the assault objectives dictate the size and shape of the airhead.

a. This selection does not necessarily include those objectives that the force must seize to secure the airhead line. An appropriate assault objective is one which the force must control early in the assault to accomplish the mission, or they must control to enhance the security of the airborne unit during the establishment of the airhead.

(1) Objectives should allow for the accomplishment of mission-essential tasks while meeting the commander's intent. They can include key terrain within the airhead or terrain required for linkup. For example, the commander has directed the airborne force to secure a bridge for later use by linkup forces. The force must secure this bridge before the enemy can destroy or damage it; therefore, the commander designates the bridge as an assault objective.

(2) The airborne unit is vulnerable from the time it lands until follow-on forces can be delivered to the airhead. A mobile enemy unit attacking the airhead during these early moments can completely disrupt the operation. Therefore, the commander selects as assault objectives terrain that dominates places where high-speed enemy avenues of approach enter the airhead.

(3) Enemy positions that both threaten the mission and are located within the airhead can also be selected as assault objectives. However, commanders would not classify mobile forces as assault objectives.

(4) Assault objectives must be seized immediately to established the airhead and to provide security for follow-on forces coming into the airhead.

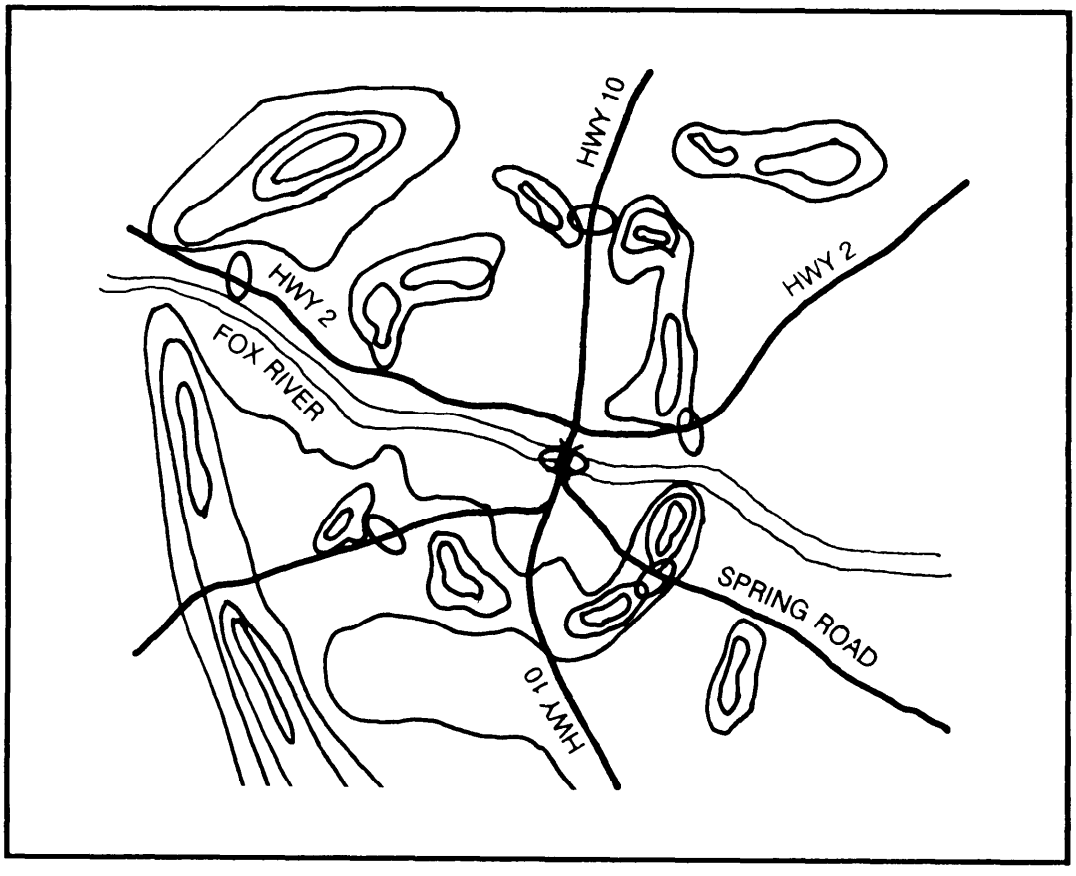

Figure 3-1. Assault objectives.

b. Other considerations impact on the development and final selection of assault objectives. Subordinate commanders decide the size, type, or disposition of the force to gain/maintain control.

- Division selects brigade assault objectives.
- Brigade selects battalion assault objectives.
- Battalion selects company assault objectives.

(1) Senior commanders choose as few assault objectives as possible since subordinate commanders must select additional objectives to establish a cohesive defense of their assigned sectors of the airhead.

(2) Assault objectives are ranked in order. A unit SOP may predesignate a numbering system for subordinate objectives. For example, all first brigade objectives begin with a "Q", or for OPSEC purposes, they may be randomly numbered or lettered. Priorities are chosen based on the most likely threat or on the needs of the friendly force.

(3) Assault objectives are secured before the defense is setup in the airhead line. The airhead is then cleared of organized enemy resistance and forces are positioned to secure the airhead line.

c. At the same time commanders select assault objectives, they consider the extent of the airhead. The airborne force seizes hostile or threatened territory. The airhead includes the entire area under control of the airborne force. It acts as a base for further operations and as a respite that allows the

airborne force to build up its combat power. Once the force secures the airhead, they must clear any enemy force within it; then, they must defend it. The airhead line, which delineates the specific area to be seized, designates the airhead. Several principle factors determine the location, extent, and form of the airhead/airhead line.

(1) The actual trace of the airhead line reflects the control of key/critical terrain essential to the mission. (Figure 3-2.)

(2) The airhead line anchors on obstacles, and the airhead itself takes advantage of existing natural and man-made obstacles.

(3) The airhead contains enough DZs, LZs, and EZs to ensure interior rather than exterior lines of communication and to permit mass rather than piecemeal assault.

(4) The airhead must allow enough space for dispersion to reduce vulnerability to NBC weapons.

(5) The airhead must be large enough to provide for defense in depth, vet small enough for the unit to defend. Although this is largely METT-T dependent, a battalion can defend an airhead 3 to 5 kilometers in diameter. A brigade can occupy an airhead 5 to 8 kilometers in diameter.

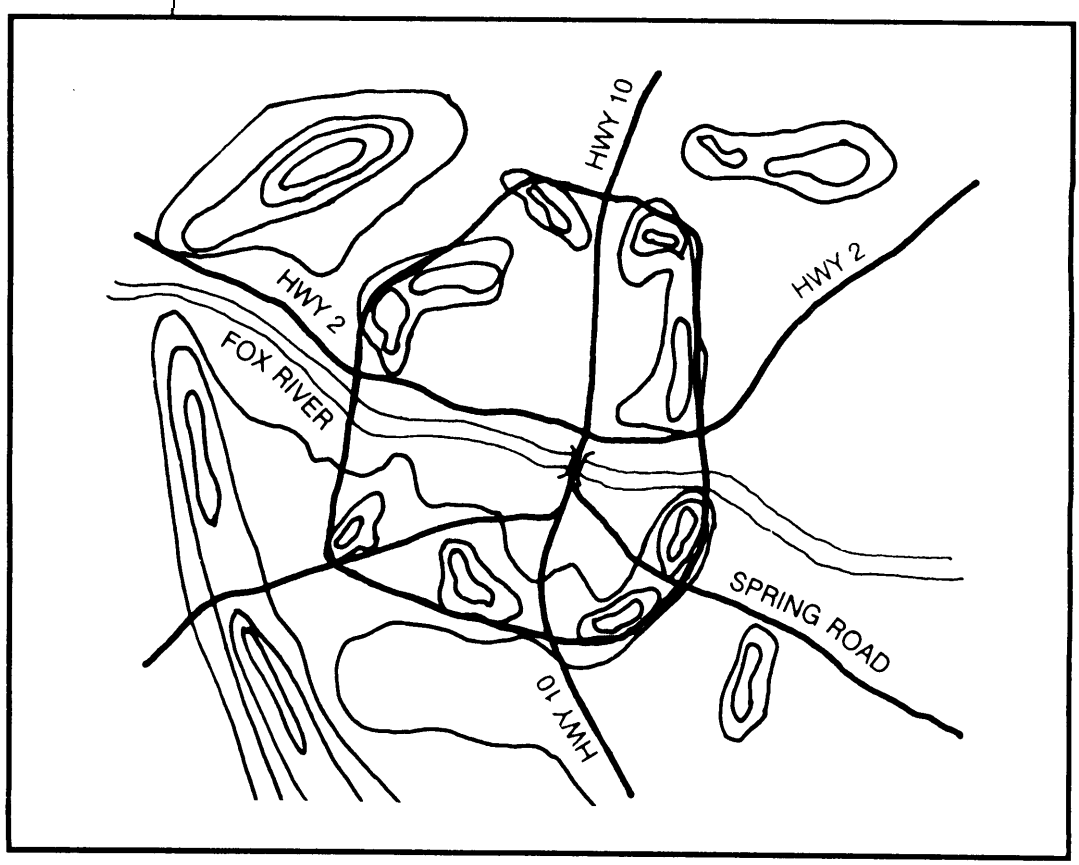

Figure 3-2. Airhead line.

3-4. RECONNAISSANCE AND SECURITY FORCES

Security in all directions is an overriding consideration early in any airborne operation, since an airhead is essentially a perimeter defense. In ground operations, there are several security echelons forward of the FEBA.

a. Security forces are landed early in the assault echelon. The reconnaissance and security line is established immediately 4 to 6 kilometers from the airhead line to afford security to the airborne force during its landing and reorganization, In the early stages of an airborne operation, the security force acts as a screening force. In later stages (when assault missions have been accomplished, when the airhead is relatively secure, and when more forces are available), it acts as a guard or covering force. Security forces come under brigade control except during short battalion missions such as raids, when they come under battalion control. The mission of the security force is as follows:

(1) To give the airhead early warning.

(2) To develop intelligence, including the location, direction, and speed of an enemy attack.

(3) To initially deny the enemy observation of and direct and observed indirect fire on the airhead.

(4) To deceive the enemy as to the actual location of the airhead.

(5) To delay and disrupt the enemy.

b. The need for and positioning of additional security forces is determined by the next subordinate commander. The security force includes scouts, AT weapons, engineers, Army aviation, and (sometimes) light armor. When possible, mobile forces are selected to facilitate rapid initial movement to positions and to facilitate withdrawal and adjustment. An aggressive R&S effort at lower echelons augments the security force. The following considerations apply to the selection of positions for the screening force:

(1) Locate them within radio communications and fire support range. However, this range can be extended, if necessary, with retransmission stations; split section indirect-fire operations; and attachment of vehicles mortars, or other assets to the security force.

(2) Locate them as roadblocks/obstacles, ambushes, patrols, or sensors (depending on the enemy) on dominant terrain. This allows long range observation and fields of fire out to the maximum range of supporting fires.

(3) Locate them to observe, control, and dominate enemy high speed avenues of approach.

(4) Locate them to deny enemy Iong-range observation and observed indirect fire into the airhead.

(5) Locate them far enough out to provide early warning.

(6) Locate them to provide routes of withdrawal to the airhead. Observation posts generally rely on their ability to hide as their main protection; they can allow the enemy to pass their position and not withdraw.

c. Designated forces under control of the airborne commander perform R&S missions beyond the security zone established by ground forces; emphasis is placed on likely enemy avenues of approach. The mission of these forces is to gain and maintain contact with enemy units reacting to the airborne assault. This force is mobile and is not used to defend a particular part of the airhead. It can include Army aviation, air cavalry, or light armor; it can be supported with fire from Air Force assets, NGF, or Army missile systems. The following considerations govern the employment of this force:

(1) These forces orient on enemy high-speed avenues of approach to develop intelligence, including the location, direction, and speed of the enemy's advance.

(2) Commanders of these forces consider known enemy locations, the number of high-speed approaches, and communications-relay abilities while orienting on enemy units.

(3) Usually employed beyond the airhead at a distance based on the tactical situation, these forces protect the main force from surprise attack. The airborne commander can extend their range if communications permit. Aviation assets can extend to 50 kilometers or more, although the commander must consider loiter time so the forces can provide continuous coverage. (FARPs can increase this distance.) Long-range surveillance teams may surveil enemy garrisons and major routes into the airhead.

(4) Reconnaissance forces must be mobile and task-organized for the mission from cavalry, armor, scout, LRS, and antiarmor units.

3-5. BOUNDARIES AND TASK ORGANIZATION

Commanders visualize the employment of subordinate units to organize them for combat commensurate with the brigade missions.

a. **Boundaries.** Commanders use boundaries to assign sectors of responsibility to major subordinate combat elements, who then clear the area of enemy forces. (Figure 3-3.) In selecting and designating assault boundaries for airborne operations, several points are considered:

(1) Each unit should be able to clear its assigned sector; therefore, commanders must consider boundaries concurrently with task organization. To assign boundaries, commanders subdivide the area into sectors with fairly equal tasks (not necessarily into equal sectors). This requires a careful analysis of the enemy, the tasks to be accomplished, and the terrain within the objective area.

(2) Commanders should avoid splitting (between two units) the responsibility for the defense of an avenue of approach or key terrain.

(3) Commanders should ensure there is adequate maneuver space in the sector, including key terrain features that control it.

(4) Commanders should avoid designating boundaries in such a way that a major terrain obstacle divides a unit sector; this presents problems for maneuvering forces.

(5) The boundaries should provide adequate room to permit the commander to maneuver forces on both sides of the assault objectives.

(6) The commanders must choose boundaries that are recognizable both on the map and on the ground. Roads should not be used as a boundary because they represent a high-speed avenue of approach and need to be covered with a clear understanding of responsibility. Instead, commanders can use rivers, streams, railroad tracks, the edge of a town, woods, the edge of a swamp, and so on.

(7) Ideally, each battalion sector should include at least one DZ and LZ to enable the battalion and its attachments to land within the assigned sector during the assault. This also facilitates resupply and evacuation of EPWs and casualties. Having an LZ and DZ reduces the problem of coordination with adjacent units. This does not mean that commanders must locate all battalion DZs in the battalion sector. Regardless of boundaries, units should drop on the DZs closest to their assault objectives.

(8) Commanders should establish boundaries that will serve during the assault and during later operations. These should be readily recognizable during limited visibility.

(9) Commanders should choose boundaries that do not require a unit to defend in more than one direction at once. Also, they should not expect a unit to secure objectives within the airhead at the same time they establish its defense.

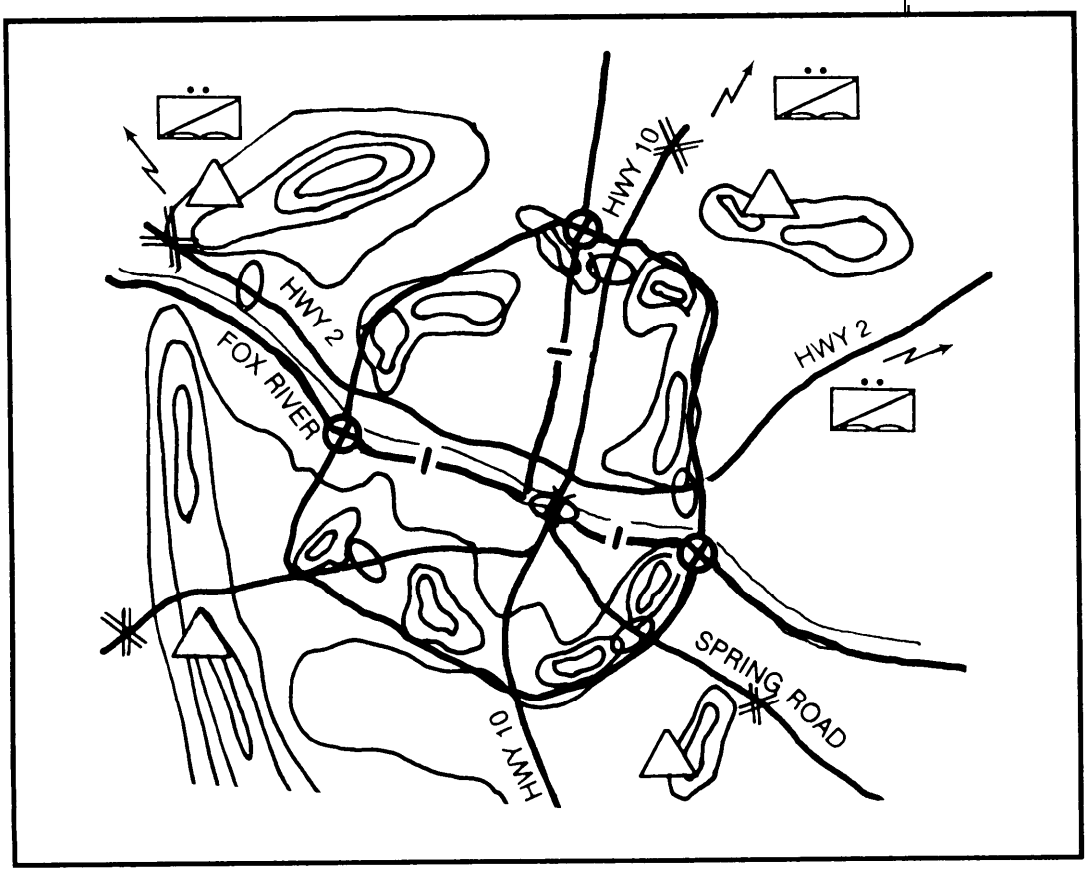

Figure 3-3. Boundaries.

(10) Boundaries should extend beyond the trace of the security force as far as necessary to coordinate fires. This also allows subordinate units to operate for-ward of the airhead with minimal coordination.

(11) Commanders should plan coordinating points at the intersection of the airhead line and security force ground trace boundaries.

b. **Task Organization.** Once commanders have determined the principal features of the ground assault plan (scheme of maneuver and fire support), they organize units to execute their assigned missions and they determine boundaries at the same time. To ensure unity of effort or to increase readiness for combat, part or all of the subordinate units of any command can be formed into one or more temporary tactical groupings (teams or task forces), each under a designated commander. No standard team organization can be prescribed in advance to meet all conditions. Infantry units usually form the nucleus tactical groupings of the team; infantry unit commanders lead the teams. These teams are tailored for initial assault by the attachment of required combat, CS, and CSS units. They are attached as soon as possible in the marshaling area. Many of the units detach as soon as centralized control can be regained and the parent unit headquarters can be established on the ground. Other units such as higher echelon assault CPs can be attached for the movement only.

(1) *Brigade.* Attachments for airborne infantry brigades usually include the following:

(a) An FA battalion.

(b) A combat engineer company.

(c) An MP platoon.

(d) A light armor company/platoon.

(c) An IEW support element, usually from the MI battalion.

(f) A forward area support team.

(g) An ADA battery.

(h) Other assets as determined necessary by the division commander based upon his estimate of the situation.

(2) *Battalion.* For control, the airborne infantry battalions are usually reinforced for the airborne assault and organized into task forces. This is especially true if battalions are to land in widely separated DZs or LZs. A battalion TF usually consists of an infantry battalion that is reinforced based on the brigade commander's estimate of the situation. Reinforcements can include more infantry, armor, antitank, engineer, dedicated artillery, and any other units or detachments needed in the initial attack. As in the brigade. attachments to infantry battalions are made early in the planning phase. They can be withdrawn as soon as the ground situation stabilizes.

(3) *Rifle units.* Rifle companies and platoons can be reinforced for the airborne assault according to the usual considerations governing a ground attack. Attachments are made before the move to, or on arrival in, the marshaling camp.

c. **Organization for Assault Landing.** After the task organization of soldiers for the assault landing is announced, units organize into assault, follow-on, and rear echelons.

(1) *Assault echelon.* The assault echelon is composed of those forces required to seize the assault objectives and the initial airhead, plus their reserves and supporting soldiers.

(2) *Follow-on echelon* The airborne force does not need the follow-on echelon in the objective area during the initial assault, but does need it for subsequent operations. When needed, the follow-on echelon enters the objective area as soon as practical by air, surface movement, or a combination of the two. It includes additional vehicles and equipment from assault echelon units, plus more combat, CS, and CSS units. The existence of any one of the following conditions requires an airborne unit to have a follow-on echelon:

- Shortage of aircraft.
- Aircraft that cannot land heavy items of equipment.
- Any enemy situation, terrain, or weather that makes it impossible to land certain soldiers or equipment in the assault echelon.

Airborne infantry units can be committed to an airborne assault without leaving a follow-on echelon that must be brought forward by means other than air; however. it is often desirable or necessary to leave certain personnel and equipment behind.

(3) *Rear echelon.* The rear echelon includes the part of an airborne unit that is not considered essential for initial combat operations. It also includes people left at its rear base to perform administrative and service support functions that cannot be done efficiently in the combat area. The rear echelon is normally small for a brigade or battalion. Higher headquarters usually controls the rear echelon for all units. The rear echelon can remain at the REMAB when the unit is to be relieved at an early date; or it can rejoin the unit when the brigade remains committed to sustained combat for a prolonged or indefinite period. Also, if the airborne force continues in the ground combat role after linkup, the rear echelon may be brought forward.

3-6. DESIGNATION OF RESERVE

The employment of the reserve element follows the normal employment of a reserve unit in a ground operation.

a. **The Battalion as the Division Reserve.** The division reserve can be held in the departure area ready to be committed by air when and where the situation dictates A battalion can be the division reserve. This usually happens in large-scale airborne operations when suitable airfields in the airhead are not available; however, it can cause delays in commitment–

- If signal communications fail.
- If the air move is very long.
- If flying weather is unfavorable.
- If time is added for coordination of air cover.

With the reserve element at the departure airfield, the reserve commander must continue planning for possible future commitment of his forces as far as maps, photos, and information of the situation permit.

b. **Brigade and Battalion Reserves.** These reserves enter the airhead as part of the assault echelon. They provide depth to the airhead by blocking penetrations, reinforcing committed units, and counterattacking. They consist of not more than a company at brigade level or a platoon at battalion level; however, their small size is dictated by tactical considerations and assigned missions. Commanders should organize, task, and position the reserve, ensuring that–

(1) The size of the reserve is compatible with likely missions.

(2) The reserve comes from the unit with the fewest priority tasks.

(3) The reserve is not assigned assault objectives or a sector of the airhead to defend.

(4) The reserve is near areas of likely employment such as near the main enemy avenues of approach to speed commitment.

(5) The reserve is mobile. (This can be achieved using organic vehicles – antiarmor company, support platoon, light armor, and so on.)

(6) The reserve is located in an AA (both initial and subsequent) or battle position, so that it does not interfere with units assigned assault objectives.

(7) The reserve is near an LOC in a covered and concealed location to provide ease of movement, to reinforce, or to block.

(8) The reserve is located within the sector of one unit, if possible.

(9) The reserve's location allows for dispersion of the force.

(10) The reserve commander prepares and rehearses commitment contingencies IAW guidance received from the commander designating the reserve.

Section II. EXECUTION

Execution of the GTP involves the initial seizure of DZs and LZs in and around the airfield or the actual seizure of an airfield. (See Chapter 7.)

3-7. CONDUCT OF THE ASSAULT

The initial assault emphasizes the coordinated action of small units to seize initial battalion objectives before the surprise advantage has worn off. As assault objectives are seized, the airborne force directs its efforts toward consolidating the airhead.

a. Tactical surprise and detailed planning should enable units to seize their assault objectives and to establish the airhead before the enemy has time to react in force. Missions of units are changed as required by the enemy defense of initial objectives. The enemy can be expected to quickly launch uncoordinated attacks along major avenues of approach using local forces. The degree of coordination and strength of these attacks increase progressively; the airborne force must develop correspondingly greater

strength in its defensive positions. Preparation of early defense against armored attack is a major consideration.

b. Units assigned to perform R&S missions land in early serials so they can establish roadblocks; locate enemy forces; disrupt enemy communication facilities; and provide the commander with early warning, security, and information. Since ground reconnaissance by unit commanders is seldom possible before the airborne operation, it must begin as soon as the unit lands. The flow of information must be continuous. Information requirements do not vary from those employed by other ground units. However, the unit's method of arrival in the combat area makes immediate and thorough reconnaissance and transmission of information to higher headquarters necessary.

c. If the initial objectives are heavily defended, the bulk of the force is assigned the task of seizing these objectives. When initial objectives are lightly defended, the bulk of the force can be employed in clearing assigned sectors and preparing defensive positions in depth. Extensive patrolling is initiated early between adjacent defensive positions within the airhead line, and between the airhead and the R&S line. Army aircraft are well suited for support of this patrolling effort. Contact with any friendly guerrilla forces in the area is established as soon as possible.

d. Personnel are briefed on unit plans, adjacent and higher units' plans, and alternate plans. This helps units or personnel landing in unplanned areas to direct their efforts to accomplishing the mission. Misdelivered units or personnel establish contact with their respective headquarters as soon as practical.

c. Sufficient communications personnel and equipment must be moved into the airhead in advance of the CP they are to serve to ensure the timely installation of vital communications. As soon as communications and the tactical situation permit, commanders regain centralized C^2. Therefore, immediate establishment of the following is necessary for effective C^2:

(1) Command and fire control channels within the airborne forces.

(2) Communications with supporting air and naval forces.

(3) Communications with airlift forces concerned with buildup, air supply, and air evacuation.

(4) Communications with bases in friendly territory.

(5) Communications between widely separated airborne or ground forces, such as linkup forces, with a common or coordinated mission.

f. The commander influences the action by–

- Shifting or allocating fire support means.
- Moving forces.
- Modifying missions.
- Changing objectives and boundaries.
- Employing reserves.
- Moving to a place from which he can best exercise personal influence, especially during the initial assault.

g. When initial objectives have been secured, subordinate units seize additional objectives that facilitate the establishment of a coordinated brigade defense or the conduct of future operations. Defensive positions are organized, communications are supplemented, and reserves are reconstituted. These and other measures are taken to prepare the force to repel enemy counterattacks, to minimize the effects of attack by nuclear weapons, or to resume the offensive.

h. Reserves prepare and occupy blocking positions, pending commitment. Typical missions for reserves committed during the initial assault include taking over the missions of misdelivered units, dealing with unexpected opposition in seizing assault objectives, and securing the initial airhead.

3-8. DEVELOPMENT OF THE AIRHEAD

After the airborne forces make the initial assault landings and accomplish the initial ground missions, commanders must organize the airhead line.

a. **Size.** The airhead line extends far enough beyond the landing area to ensure uninterrupted landings of personnel, equipment, and supplies. It secures the requisite terrain features and maneuver space for such future offensive or defensive operations as the mission calls for.

b. **Occupation and Organization.** Units occupy and organize the airhead line to the extent demanded by the situation. Commanders adjust the disposition of units and installations to fit the terrain and the situation. Units take reconnaissance and security measures; this usually includes the reinforcement of the R&S line. The degree to which the airhead line is actually occupied and organized for defense is largely determined by the mission, enemy capabilities, and the defensive characteristics of the terrain.

c. **Buildup.** This proceeds concurrently with the seizure and organization of the airhead line. As more combat personnel arrive and commanders organize them by unit, frontline positions are reinforced, reserves are constituted, and preparations are mare for such offensive operations as the mission requires.

3-9. BUILDUP OF COMBAT POWER

The buildup of combat power is the introduction of the follow-on echelon into the airhead. This increase of friendly combat power yields a corresponding ability to conduct a defense of the airhead and to conduct a short term sustainment of those forces. The intent of the buildup is to provide a secure operating and logistic base for forces working to move the airhead away from the original point of attack. Usually, this distance is equal to the enemy's direct fire capability to harass and destroy incoming aircraft or landing craft (5 to 10 kilometers).

a. The composition of the follow-on echelon depends on the factors of METT-T. It can consist of heavy, light, long-range FA, and combat engineers as well as significant CS and CSS elements. Other forces required can include the following:

- Infantry Forces.
- Light/heavy task forces.

- Armored units task-organized with light forces already in the objective area.
- Field artillery.
- Engineers in addition to those in the assault echelon.
- Air defense artillery.
- CSS assets.

b. The time involved in defensive operations, if any, varies. It depends on the mission assigned, the composition and size of the force, the enemy reaction, and the type of operation contemplated. A well-prepared defense in short-duration missions in isolated objective areas may not be required. Security can be accomplished by completely or almost completely destroying or dispersing the enemy forces in the immediate objective area during the assault; then, airlifting the striking force before the execution of a coordinated enemy counterattack.

(1) *Defense of an airhead.* The airborne force usually defends an airhead by securing key terrain within the airhead and dominating likely avenues of approach. Units deny the enemy the areas between the occupied positions with a combination of patrols, mines, fire, and natural and man-made obstacles. Units aggressively reconnoiter between positions within the airhead, between the airhead and the RSL, and forward of the RSL. They increase emphasis on reconnaissance forward of the RSL during limited visibility. The airhead configuration allows the commander to shift forces, reserves, and supporting fires quickly to reinforce another sector of the airhead. Regardless of the form of defense chosen, the force prepares positions in depth within its capabilities.

(2) *Defense during withdrawal.* Should withdrawal from the initial positions be required, the final area to which the airborne force withdraws must contain adequate space for maneuver, for protection of critical installations, and for planned airlanding or air evacuation operations.

(3) *Defense against armor.* During the initial phases of an airborne operation, one of the main defenses against enemy armor is tactical air support. Aircraft attack enemy armor targets as they appear, as far as possible from the objective area, and continue to attack and observe them as long as they threaten the airborne force. Strongpoints defending the airhead use natural obstacles, plus mine fields, tank traps, demolitions, and man-made obstacles. Units emplace AT weapons in depth along avenues of approach favorable for armor. They cover all dangerous avenues of approach with planned fires. The Dragons and LAWs of the rifle companies, the TOWs of the battalion antiarmor company, and the AT weapons of division aviation units give the airborne force a substantial amount of antitank firepower. Some of the antitank weapons, organic to battalions that are holding sectors not under armored attack, can be moved to reinforce threatened sectors.

(4) *Defense against air assault.* All personnel must recognize that the enemy can conduct air assault operations and must defend against these attacks. Helicopters afford the enemy one of their best means of rapidly moving significant tactical forces to the airhead area.

(5) *Defense against airborne attack, guerrilla action, and infiltration.* The defense must include plans for countering enemy airborne attacks, guerrilla attacks, or infiltrated forces attacking the airhead area. The basic defense

against these attacks is an extensive patrol and warning system, an all-round defense, and designated reserve units ready to move out quickly to destroy the enemy force. Units must be especially alert during limited visibility to prevent the enemy from infiltrating. If the enemy can build up forces in the airhead interior, they can influence operations. During daylight, units must locate and destroy any enemy that have infiltrated the airhead.